



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on the Fall 2004 Parliamentary Elections in Kazakhstan

As delivered by Ambassador Stephan M. Minikes
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
January 19, 2005

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Our delegation read with great interest ODIHR's final report on the Parliamentary Elections that took place in Kazakhstan this past fall.

First of all, we would like to thank ODIHR for its work and to commend it on a thorough and well-written report.

We note that the two rounds of elections proceeded peacefully and without disruption. Moreover, in some areas these elections were an improvement over previous ones, thanks largely to efforts by the Government of Kazakhstan to amend its electoral law and to bring it closer to conformity with international standards and Kazakhstan's OSCE commitments.

However, as the ODIHR report notes, despite important improvements in the Parliamentary elections, serious shortcomings do remain, and the process as a whole fell short of OSCE commitments and other international standards for democratic elections in several ways.

ODIHR noted that most of these shortcomings stemmed from three underlying factors: first, the lack of transparency in election administration, second, insufficient political will to effectively and impartially implement the election legislation, and third, remaining problems with the electoral law.

Mr. Chairman, the United States urges the Government of Kazakhstan to move swiftly to continue the process that was begun last year to amend its election law as recommended by ODIHR.

These amendments would facilitate Kazakhstan's efforts to address other shortcomings which we identified by the ODIHR team and it will help establish a solid legal foundation for democratic elections that is rooted in compliance with OSCE commitments and other international election standards.

Further improvements to the election law will demonstrate Kazakhstan's determination to respect its OSCE commitments, as Ambassador Aliyev acknowledged last week in his reply to the Chairman in Office. These improvements could be implemented in time for the Presidential elections in 2006.

Additionally, with a solid foundation in place, there would be a mechanism to address the lingering structural problems noted in the ODIHR report, such as a lack of transparency in the

election administration, apparent biases in media coverage, technical and administrative problems with voter lists, and the need for more training for lower level election commission officials to help them fully understand the election law.

Mr. Chairman, only free and fair elections, where there are clear choices among candidates for the voters, where candidates have unfettered access to the media, and where neither the media nor the electorate are subject to influence, will produce results that reflect the will of the people. Governments, in turn, derive their very legitimacy from reflecting the popular will.

The United States stands ready to offer all appropriate assistance to participating States in their efforts to comply fully with their OSCE election commitments.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.